



St Andrew Ward Esq.<sup>r</sup>

Hooton, Tagnell.

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# SERMONS

BY

The late Rev. Mr. STERNE.

VOL. V.



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N. B. Such of the Subscribers names as could not be had time enough to be prefixed to this edition, shall certainly be inserted in the next.

# S E R M O N I.

Temporal Advantages of Religion.

VOL. VI

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# S E R M O N I.

PROVERBS iii. 17.

*Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and  
all her paths are peace.*

**T**HERE are two opinions which the inconsiderate are apt to take upon trust.—The first is—a vicious life, is a life of liberty, pleasure, and happy advantages.—The second is—and which is the converse of the first—that a religious life is a servile and most uncomfortable state.

The first breach which the devil made upon human innocence, was by

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the

the help of the first of these suggestions, when he told Eve, that by eating of the tree of knowledge, she should be as God, that is, she should reap some high and strange felicity from doing what was forbidden her.— But I need not repeat the success— Eve learnt the difference between good and evil by her transgression, which she knew not before—but then she fatally learnt at the same time, that the difference was only this—that good is that which can only give the mind pleasure and comfort—and that evil is that, which must necessarily be attended sooner or later with shame and sorrow.

As the deceiver of mankind thus began his triumph over our race—so  
3 has

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## 6      S E R M O N I.

ture—and that instead of fulfilling these hopes of gain and sweetness in what is forbidden—that on the contrary, every unlawful enjoyment leads only to bitterness and loss.

The second opinion, or, That a religious life is a servile and uncomfortable state, has proved a no less fatal and capital false principle in the conduct of unexperience through life—the foundation of which mistake arising chiefly from this previous wrong judgment—that true happiness and freedom lies in a man's always following his own humour—that to live by moderate and prescrib'd rules, is to live without joy—that not to prosecute our passions is to be cowards—  
and

# S E R M O N I. 7

and to forego every thing for the tedious distance of a future life.

Was it true that a virtuous man could have no pleasure but what should arise from that remote prospect—I own we are by nature so goaded on by the desire of present happiness, that was that the case, thousands wou'd faint under the discouragement of so remote an expectation.—But in the mean time the Scriptures give us a very different prospect of this matter.—There we are told that the service of God is true liberty—that the yoke of Christianity is easy in comparison of that yoke which must be brought upon us by any other system of living,—and the

B 4

text

## 8      S E R M O N I.

text tells of wisdom—by which he means Religion, that it has pleasantness in its way, as well as glory in its end—that it will bring us peace and joy such as the world cannot give.—So that upon examining the truth of this assertion, we shall be set right in this error, by seeing that a religious man's happiness does not stand at so tedious a distance—but is so present and indeed so inseparable from him, as to be felt and tasted every hour—and of this even the vicious can hardly be insensible, from what he may perceive to spring up in his mind, from any casual act of virtue. And tho' it is a pleasure that properly belongs to the good—yet let any one try the experiment,  
and

## S E R M O N I. 9

and he will see what is meant by that moral delight, arising from the conscience of well-doing.—Let him but refresh the bowels of the needy—let him comfort the broken-hearted—or check an appetite, or overcome a temptation—or receive an affront with temper and meekness—and he shall find the tacit praise of what he has done, darting thro' his mind, accompanied with a sincere pleasure—conscience playing the monitor even to the loose and most inconsiderate, in their most casual acts of well-doing, and is, like a voice whispering behind and saying—this is the way of pleasantness—this is the path of peace—walk in it.—

But

But to do further justice to the text, we must look beyond this inward recompence which is always inseparable from virtue—and take a view of the outward advantages, which are as inseparable from it, and which the Apostle particularly refers to, when 'tis said, Godliness has the promise of this life, as well as that which is to come—and in this argument it is, that religion appears in all its glory and strength—unanswerable in all its obligations—that besides the principal work which it does for us in securing our future well-being in the other world, it is likewise the most effectual means to promote our present—and that not only *morally*, upon account of that reward which  
virtuous



## S E R M O N I. 11

virtuous actions do entitle a man unto from a just and a wise providence,—but by a natural tendency in themselves, which the duties of religion have *to procure* us riches, health, reputation, credit, and all those things, wherein our temporal happiness is thought to consist,—and this not only in promoting the well-being of particular persons, but of public communities and of mankind in general,—agreeable to what the wise man has left us on record, that righteousness exalteth a nation:—inso-much,—that could we, in considering this argument, suppose ourselves to be in a capacity of expostulating with God, concerning the terms upon  
which

which we would submit to his government,—and to chuse the laws ourselves which we would be bound to observe, it would be impossible for the wit of man to frame any other proposals, which upon all accounts would be more advantageous to our own interests than those very conditions to which we are obliged by the rules of religion and virtue.—And in this does the reasonableness of christianity, and the beauty and wisdom of providence appear most eminently towards mankind, in governing us by such laws, as do most apparently tend to make us happy,—and in a word, in making that (in his mercy) to be our duty, which in his wisdom he knows to be our interest,—that is  
to

to say, what is most conducive to the ease and comfort of our mind,—the health and strength of our body,—the honour and prosperity of our state and condition,—the friendship and good will of our fellow creatures;—to the attainment of all which, no more effectual means can possibly be made use of, than that plain direction,—to lead an uncorrupted life, and to do the thing which is right, to use no deceit in our tongue, nor do evil to our neighbour.

For the better imprinting of which truth in your memories, give me leave to offer a few things to your consideration.

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The first is,—that justice and honesty contribute very much towards all the faculties of the mind: I mean, that it clears up the understanding from that mist, which dark and crooked designs are apt to raise in it,—and that it keeps up a regularity in the affections, by suffering no lusts or *by-ends* to disorder them.—That it likewise preserves the mind from all damps of grief and melancholy, which are the sure consequences of unjust actions; and that by such an improvement of the faculties, it makes a man so much the abler to discern, and so much the more chearful, active and diligent to mind his business.—Light is sown for the righteous, says  
the

the prophet, and gladness for the upright in heart.—

Secondly, let it be observed,—that in the continuance and course of a virtuous man's affairs, there is little probability of his falling into considerable disappointments or calamities;—not only because guarded by the providence of God, but that honesty is in its own nature the freest from danger.

First, because such a one lays no projects, which it is the interest of another to blast, and therefore needs no indirect methods or deceitful practices to secure his interest by undermining others.—The paths of  
virtue

virtue are plain and strait, so that the blind, persons of the meanest capacity, shall not err.—Dishonesty requires skill to conduct it, and as great art to conceal—what 'tis every one's interest to detect. And I think I need not remind you how oft it happens in attempts of this kind—where worldly men, in haste to be rich, have over-run the only means to it,—and for want of laying their contrivances with proper cunning, or managing them with proper secrecy and advantage, have lost for ever, what they might have certainly secured by honesty and plain-dealing.—The general causes of the disappointments in their business, or of unhappiness in their lives, lying but too manifestly in  
their

their own disorderly passions, which by attempting to carry them a shorter way to riches and honour, disappoint them of both for ever, and make plain their ruin is from themselves, and that they eat the fruits, which their own hands have watered and ripened.

Consider, in the third place, that as the religious and moral man (one of which he cannot be without the other) not only takes the surest course for success in his affairs, but is disposed to procure a help, which never enters into the thoughts of a wicked one : for being conscious of upright intentions, he can look towards heaven, and with some assurance recom-

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mend his affairs to God's blessing and direction :—whereas the fraudulent and dishonest Man, dares not call for God's blessing upon his designs,—or if he does, he knows it is in vain to expect it.—Now a man who believes that he has God on his side, acts with another sort of life and courage, than he who knows he stands alone ;—like Esau, with his hand against every man, and every man's hand against his.

The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry,—but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

Consider, in the fourth place, that in all good governments who understand



stand their own interest, the upright and honest man stands much fairer for preferment, and much more likely to be employed in all things when fidelity is wanted:—for all men, however the case stands with themselves, they love at least to find honesty in those they trust; nor is there any usage we more hardly digest, than that of being outwitted and deceived.—This is so true an observation, that the greatest knaves have no other way to get into business, but by counterfeiting honesty, and pretending to be what they are not; and when the imposture is discovered, as it is a thousand to one but it will, I have just said, what must be the certain consequence:—

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for

for when such a one falls,—he has none to help him,—so he seldom rises again.—

This brings us to a fifth particular in vindication of the text,—That a virtuous man has this strong advantage on his side (the reverse of the last) that the more and the longer he is known, so much the better is he loved,—so much the more trusted;—so that his reputation and his fortune have a gradual increase :—and if calamities or cross accidents should bear him down,—(as no one stands out of their reach in this world)—if he should fall, who would not pity his distress,—who would not stretch forth his hand to raise him from the ground !—

ground!—wherever there was virtue, he might expect to meet a friend and brother.—And this is not merely speculation, but fact, confirmed by numberless examples in life, of men falling into misfortunes, whose character and tried probity have raised them helps, and bore them up, when every other help has forsok them.

Lastly, to sum up the account of the temporal advantages which probity has on its side,—let us not forget that greatest of all happiness, which the text refers to,—in the expression of all its paths being peace,—peace and content of mind, arising from the consciousness of virtue, which is the

true and only foundation of all earthly satisfaction ; and where that is wanting, whatever other enjoyments you bestow upon a wicked man, they will as soon add a cubit to his stature as to his happiness.—In the midst of the highest entertainments,—this, like the hand-writing upon the wall, will be enough to spoil and disrelish the feast ;—but much more so, when the tumult and hurry of delight is over,—when all is still and silent,—when the sinner has nothing to do but attend its lashes and remorses ;—and this, in spite of all the common arts of diversion, will be often the case of every wicked man ;—for we cannot live always upon the stretch ;—our faculties will not bear constant pleasure

pleasure any more than constant pain ;—there will be some vacancies ; and when there are, they will be sure to be filled with uncomfortable thoughts and black reflections.—So that, setting aside the great after-reckoning, the pleasures of the wicked are over-bought, even in this world.—

I conclude with one observation upon the whole of this argument, which is this—

Notwithstanding the great force with which it has been often urged by good writers,—there are many cases which it may not reach,—wherein vicious men may seem to enjoy their portion of this life,—and

live as happy, and fall into as few troubles as other men :—and, therefore, it is prudent not to lay more stress upon this argument than it will bear :—but always remember to call into our aid, that great and more unanswerable argument, which will answer the most doubtful cases which can be stated,—and that is, certainty of a future life, which christianity has brought to light.—However men may differ in their opinions of the usefulness of virtue for our present purposes,—no one was ever so absurd, as to deny it served our best and our last interest,—when the little interests of this life were at an end :—upon which consideration we should always lay the great weight which it  
is

is fittest to bear, as the strongest appeal, and most unchangeable motive that can govern our actions at all times.—However, as every good argument on the side of religion should in proper times be made use of,—it is fit sometimes to examine this,—by proving virtue is not even destitute of a present reward,—but carries in her hand a sufficient recompence for all the self-denials she may occasion:—she is pleasant in the way,—as well as in the end;—her ways being ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace.—But it is her greatest and most distinguished glory,—that she befriends us hereafter, and brings us peace at the last;—

last ;—and this is a portion she can never be disinherited of,—which may God of his mercy grant us all, for the sake of Jesus Christ.

S E R.



# **S E R M O N II.**

**Our Conversation in Heaven.**



## S E R M O N II.

PHILIPPIANS iii. 20. 1st Part.

*For our conversation is in heaven.*

**T**HESE words are the conclusion of the account which St. Paul renders of himself, to justify that particular part of his conduct and proceeding,—his leaving so strangely, and deserting his Jewish rites and ceremonies, to which he was known to have been formerly so much attached, and in defence of which he had been so warmly and so remarkably engaged. This, as it had been matter of provocation against him

him amongst his own countrymen the Jews, so was it no less an occasion of surprize to the Gentiles;—that a person of his great character, interest and reputation,—one who was descended from a tribe of Israel, deeply skilled in the professions, and zealous in the *observances of the straitest sect of that religion*; who had their tenets instilled into him from his tender years, under the institution of the ablest masters;—a Pharisee himself,—the son of a Pharisee, and brought up at the feet of Gamaliel,—one that was so deeply interested, and an accessory in the persecution of another religion, just then newly come up;—a religion to which his whole sect, as well as himself, had

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been

been always the bitterest and most inveterate enemies, and were constantly upbraided as such, by the first founder of it;—that a person so beset, and hem'd in with interests and prejudices on all sides, should after all turn profelyte to the very religion he had hated;—a religion too, under the most universal contempt of any then in the world,—the chiefs and leaders of it men of the lowest birth and education, without any advantages of parts or learning, or other endowments to recommend them:—that he should quit and abandon all his former privileges, to become merely a fellow-labourer with these,—that he should give up the reputation he had acquired amongst  
his

his brethren by the study and labours of a whole life ;—that he should give up his friends,—his relations and family, from whom he estranged and banished himself for life ;—this was an event so very extraordinary,—so odd and unaccountable,—that it might well confound the minds of men to answer for it.—It was not to be accounted for upon the common rules and measures of proceeding in human life.—

The apostle, therefore, since no one else could so well do it for him, comes, in this chapter, to give an explanation why he had thus forsaken so many worldly advantages,—which was owing to a greater and more

unconquerable affection to a better and more valuable interest,—that in the poor persecuted faith,—which he had once reproached and destroyed,—he had now found such a fullness of divine grace,—such unfathomable depths of God's infinite mercy, and love towards mankind, that he could think nothing too much to part with in order to his embracing christianity ;—nay, he accounted all things but loss,—that is, less than nothing, for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The apostle, after this apology for himself,—proceeds, in the second verse before the text, to give a very different representation of the worldly

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views and sensual principles of other pretending teachers,—who had set themselves up as an example for men to walk by, against whom he renews this caution:—For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies to the cross of Christ,—whose end is destruction,—whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things,---*φρωγίτες*,---relish them, making them the only object of their wishes,—taking aim at nothing better, and nothing higher.—But *our* conversation, says he in the text, is in heaven.—We christians, who have embraced a persecuted faith, are governed by other considerations,—



have greater and nobler views ;—here we consider ourselves only as pilgrims and strangers.—Our home is in another country, where we are continually tending ; there our hearts and affections are placed ; and when the few days of our pilgrimage shall be over, there shall we return, where a quiet habitation and a perpetual rest is designed and prepared for us for ever.—

Our conversation is in heaven, from whence, says he, we also look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto him.—It is observable,

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that St. Peter represents the state of christians under the same image, of strangers on earth, whose city and proper home, is heaven:—he makes use of that relation of citizens of heaven, as a strong argument for a pure and holy life,—beseeching them *as pilgrims and strangers here*, as men whose interests and connections are of so short a date, and so trifling a nature,—to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul, that is, unfit it for its heavenly country, and give it a disrelish to the enjoyment of that pure and spiritualized happiness, of which that region must consist, wherein there shall in no wise enter any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination.—

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The apostle tells us, that without holiness no man shall see God;—by which no doubt he means, that a virtuous life is the only medium of happiness and terms of salvation,—which can only give us admission into heaven.—But some of our divines carry the assertion further, that without holiness,—without some previous similitude wrought in the faculties of the mind, corresponding with the nature of the purest of beings, who is to be the object of our fruition hereafter;—that it is not morally only, but physically impossible for it to be happy,—and that an impure and polluted soul, is not only unworthy of so pure a presence as the

D 3 spirit

spirit of God, but even incapable of enjoying it, could it be admitted.

And here, not to feign a long hypothesis, as some have done, of a sinner's being admitted into heaven, with a particular description of his condition and behaviour there,—we need only consider, that the supreme good, like any other good, is of a relative nature, and consequently the enjoyment of it must require some qualification in the faculty, as well as the enjoyment of any other good does ;—there must be something antecedent in the disposition and temper, which will render that good a good to that individual,—otherwise though (it is true) it may be possessed,—

feffed,—yet it never can be enjoyed.—

Preach to a voluptuous epicure, who knows of no other happiness in this world, but what arises from good eating and drinking;—such a one, in the apostle's language, whose God was his belly;—preach to him of the abstractions of the soul, tell of its flights, and brisker motion in the pure regions of immensity;—represent to him that saints and angels eat not,—but that the spirit of a man lives for ever upon wisdom and holiness, and heavenly contemplations:—why, the only effect would be, that the fat glutton would stare a while upon the preacher, and in a few

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minutes fall fast asleep.—No; if you would catch his attention, and make him take in your discourse greedily,—you must preach to him out of the Alcoran,—talk of the raptures of sensual enjoyments, and of the pleasures of the perpetual feasting, which Mahomet has described;—there you touch upon a note which awakens and sinks into the inmost recesses of his soul;—without which, discourse as wisely and abstractedly as you will of heaven, your representations of it, however glorious and exalted, will pass like the songs of melody over an ear incapable of discerning the distinction of sounds.—

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We see, even in the common intercourses of society,—how tedious it is to be in the company of a person whose humour is disagreeable to our own, though perhaps in all other respects of the greatest worth and excellency.—How then can we imagine that an ill-disposed soul, whose conversation never reached to heaven, but whose appetites and desires, to the last hour, have grovel'd upon this unclean spot of earth;—how can we imagine it should hereafter take pleasure in God, or be able to taste joy or satisfaction from his presence, who is so infinitely pure, that he even putteth no trust in his saints,—nor are the heavens themselves (as Job says) clean in his sight.—

fight.—The consideration of this has led some writers so far, as to say, with some degree of irreverence in the expression,—that it was not in the power of God to make a wicked man happy, if the soul was separated from the body, with all its vicious habits and inclinations unreformed;—which thought, a very able divine in our church has pursued so far, as to declare his belief,—that could the happiest mansion in heaven be supposed to be allotted to a gross and polluted spirit, it would be so far from being happy in it, that it would do penance there to all eternity:—by which he meant, it would carry such appetites along with it, for which there could be found no suitable

able.



able objects.—A sufficient cause for constant torment;—for those that it found there, would be so disproportioned, that they would rather vex and upbraid it, than satisfy its wants.—This, it is true, is mere speculation,—and what concerns us not to know;—it being enough for our purpose, that such an experiment is never likely to be tried,—that we stand upon different terms with God,—that a virtuous life is the foundation of all our happiness,—that as God has no pleasure in wickedness, neither shall any evil dwell with him;—and that, if we expect our happiness to be in heaven,—we must have our conversation in heaven, whilst upon earth,—make it the frequent subject of our thoughts

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thoughts and meditations,—let every step we take tend that way,—every action of our lives be conducted by that great mark of the prize of our high-calling, forgetting those things which are behind;—forgetting this world,---disengaging our thoughts and affections from it, and thereby transforming them to the likeness of what we hope to be hereafter.—How can we expect the inheritance of the saints of light, upon other terms than what they themselves obtained it?—

Can that body expect to rise and shine in glory, that is a slave to lust, or dies in the fiery pursuit of an impure desire? Can that heart ever become

come the lightsome feat of peace and joy, that burns hot as an oven with anger, rage, envy, lust, and strife? full of wicked imaginations, set only to devise and entertain evil?

Can that flesh appear in the last day, and inherit the kingdom of heaven in the glorified strength of perpetual youth, that is now clearly consumed in intemperance,—sinks in the surfeit of continual drunkenness and gluttony, and then tumbles into the grave, and almost pollutes the ground that is under it?—Can we reasonably suppose, that head shall ever wear or become the crown of righteousness and peace, in which dwells nothing but craft and avarice,

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deceit and fraud and treachery,—  
 which is always plodding upon  
 worldly designs, racked with ambi-  
 tion,—rent asunder with discord,—  
 ever delighting in mischief to others,  
 and unjust advantages to itself?—Shall  
 that tongue, which is the glory of a  
 man when rightly directed,—be ever  
 set to God's heavenly praises, and  
 warble forth the harmonies of the  
 blessed, that is now full of cursing  
 and bitterness, backbiting and slan-  
 der, under which is ungodliness and  
 vanity and the poison of asps?

Can it enter into our hearts even  
 to hope, that those hands can ever  
 receive the reward of righteousness,  
 that are full of blood, laden with  
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the wages of iniquity, of theft, rapin, violence, extortion, or other unlawful gain? or that those feet shall ever be beautiful upon the mountains of light and joy, that were never shod for the preparation of the gospel,—that have run quite out of the way of God's word,—and made haste only to do evil?—no surely.—In this sense,—he that is unjust, let him be unjust still,—and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still.

How inconsistent the whole body of sin is, with the glories of the celestial body that shall be revealed hereafter,—and that in proportion as we fix the representation of these glories upon our minds, and in the  
more

more numerous particulars we do it,—the stronger the necessity as well as persuasion to deny ourselves all ungodliness and worldly lusts, to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world, as the only way to entitle us to that blessedness spoken of in the Revelations—of those who do his commandments, and have a right to the tree of life, and shall enter into the gates of the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels;—to the general assembly and church of the first-born, that are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,—who have washed their robes, and made them

them

them white in the blood of the Lamb.—

May God give us grace to live under the perpetual influence of this expectation,—that by the habitual impression of these glories upon our imaginations, and the frequent sending forth our thoughts and employing them on the other world,—we may disentangle them from this,—and by so having our conversation in heaven whilst we are here, we may be thought fit inhabitants for it hereafter;—that when God at the last day shall come with thousands and ten thousands of his saints to judge the world, we may enter with them into happiness, and with angels and

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arch-angels, and all the company of heaven, we may praise and magnify his glorious name, and enjoy his presence for ever.    Amen.

S E R -



# S E R M O N III.

Description of the World.

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## S E R M O N    I I I.

2 PETER iii. 11.

*Seeing then, that all these things shall be dissolved,—what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness? looking and hastening unto the coming of God.*

THE subject upon which St. Peter is discoursing in this chapter, is the certainty of Christ's coming to judge the world ;—and the words of the text are the moral application he draws from the representation he gives of it,—in which, in answer to the cavils of the scoffers

in the latter days, concerning the delay of his coming,—he tells them, that God is not slack concerning his promises, as some men count slackness, but is long suffering to us ward;—*that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burnt up.*—Seeing then, says he, all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?—The inference is unavoidable,—at least in theory, however it fails in practice;—how widely these two differ, I intend to make the subject of this discourse;

discourse ; and though it is a melancholy comparison, to consider, ‘ what manner of persons we *really* are,’ with ‘ what manner of persons we *ought* to be,’ yet as the knowledge of the one, is at least one step towards the improvement in the other,—the parallel will not be thought to want its use.

Give me leave, therefore, in the first place, to recall to your observations, what kind of world it is we live in, and what manner of persons we really are.

Secondly, and in opposition to this, I shall make use of the apostle’s argument, and from a brief representation of the christian religion, and the obligations it lays upon us, shew,

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what

what manner of persons we *ought* to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God.

Whoever takes a view of the world will, I fear, be able to discern, but very faint marks of this character, either upon the looks or actions of its inhabitants.—Of all the ends and pursuits we are looking for, and hastening unto,—this would be the least suspected,—for without running into that old declamatory cant upon the wickedness of the age,—we may say within the bounds of truth,—that there is as little influence from this principle which the apostle lays stress on, and as little sense of religion,—

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as small a share of virtue (at least as little of the appearance of it) as can be supposed to exist at all in a country where it is countenanced by the state.—The degeneracy of the times, has been the common complaint of many ages:—how much we exceed our forefathers in this, is known alone to that God who trieth the hearts.—But this we may be allowed to urge in their favour, they studied at least to preserve the appearance of virtue;—publick vice was branded with publick infamy, and obliged to hide its head in privacy and retirement. The service of God was regularly attended, and religion not exposed to the reproaches of the scorner.

How the case stands with us at present in each of these particulars, it is grievous to report, and perhaps unacceptable to religion herself; yet as this is a season wherein it is fit we should be told of our faults, let us for a moment impartially consider the articles of this charge.

And first, concerning the great article of religion, and the influence it has at present upon the lives and behaviour of the present times;—concerning which I have said, that if we are to trust appearances, there is as little as can well be supposed to exist at all in a christian country.—Here I shall spare exclamations, and avoiding all common place railing upon



upon the subject, confine myself to facts, such as every one who looks out into the world, and makes any observations at all, will vouch for me.

Now whatever are the degrees of real religion amongst us,—whatever they are, the appearances are strong against the charitable side of the question.—

If religion is any where to be found, one would think it would be amongst those of the higher rank in life, whose education and opportunities of knowing its great importance, should have brought them over to its interest, and rendered them as firm in the defence of it, as eminent  
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in its example.—But if you examine the fact, you will almost find it a test of a politer education and mark of more shining parts, to know nothing, and indeed, care nothing at all about it:—or if the subject happens to engage the attention of a few of the more sprightly wits,—that it serves no other purpose, but that of being made merry at, and of being reserved, as a standing jest to enliven discourse, when conversation sickens upon their hands.—

This is too fore an evil not to be observed amongst persons of all ages, in what is called higher life; and so early does the contempt of this great concern begin to shew itself—that it is

no

no uncommon thing to hear persons disputing against religion, and raising cavils against the Bible, at an age when some of them would be hard set to read a chapter in it.—And I may add, that of those whose stock in knowledge is somewhat larger, that for the most part it has scarce any other foundation to rest on but the sinking credit of traditional and second-hand objections against revelation, which had they leisure to read, they would find answered and confuted a thousand times over.—But this by the way.—

If we take a view of the public worship of Almighty God, and observe in what manner it is revered by persons in this rank of life, whose duty it is to set an example

ple to the poor and ignorant, we shall find concurring evidence upon this melancholy argument—of a general want of all outward demonstration of a sense of our duty towards God, as if religion was a business fit only to employ tradesmen and mechanics—and the salvation of our souls, a concern utterly below the consideration of a person of figure and consequence.—

I shall say nothing at present of the lower ranks of mankind—though they have not yet got into the fashion of laughing at religion, and treating it with scorn and contempt, and I believe are too serious a set of creatures ever to come into it; yet we are not to imagine but that the contempt  
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it is held in by those whose examples they are too apt to imitate, will in time utterly shake their principles, and render them, if not as prophane, at least as corrupt as their betters.—

When this event happens—and we begin to *feel* the effects of it in our dealings with them, those who have done the mischief will find the necessity at last of turning religious in their own defence, and for want of a better principle, to set an example of piety and good morals for their own interest and convenience.—

Thus much for the languishing state of religion in the present age ;— in virtue and good morals perhaps the account may stand higher.—

Let

Let us enquire——

And here, I acknowledge, that an unexperienced man, who heard how loudly we all talked in behalf of virtue and moral honesty, and how unanimous we were all in our cry against vicious characters of all denominations, would be apt hastily to conclude, that the whole world was in an uproar about it—and that there was so general a horror and detestation of vice amongst us, that mankind were all associating together to hunt it out of the world, and give it no quarter.—This I own would be a natural conclusion for any one who only trusted his ears upon this subject.—But as matter of fact is allowed better evidence

evidence than hear-say—let us see in the present how the one case is contradicted by the other.—

However vehement we approve ourselves in discourse against vice—I believe no one is ignorant that the reception it actually meets with is very different—the conduct and behaviour of the world is so opposite to their language, and all we hear so contradicted by what we see, as to leave little room to question which sense we are to trust.—

Look, I beseech you, amongst those whose higher stations are made a shelter for the liberties they take, you will see, that no man's character

is so infamous, nor any woman's so abandoned, as not to be visited and admitted freely into all companies, and, if the party can pay for it, even publicly to be courted, caressed, and flattered.—If this will not overthrow the credit of our virtue,—take a short view of the general decay of it, from the fashionable excesses of the age,—in favour of which there seems to be formed so strong a party, that a man of sobriety, temperance, and regularity, scarce knows how to accommodate himself to the society he lives in,—and is oft as much at a loss how and where to dispose of himself;—and unless you suppose a mixture of constancy in his temper, it is great odds but such a one would



be ridiculed, and laughed out of his scruples and his virtue at the same time;—to say nothing of occasional rioting, chambering and wantonness.—Consider how many public markets are established merely for the sale of virtue,—where the manner of going, too sadly indicates the intention;—and the disguise each is under, not only gives power safely to drive on the bargain, but too often tempts to carry it into execution too.—

This sinning under disguise, I own, seems to carry some appearance of a secret homage to virtue and decorum, and might be acknowledged as such, was it not the only public instance the world seems to give of it.—In

other cases, a just sense of shame seems a matter of so little concern, that instead of any regularity of behaviour, you see thousands who are tired with the very form of it, and who at length have even thrown the mask of it aside, as a useless piece of incumbrance.—This I believe will need no evidence, it is too evidently seen in the open liberties taken every day, in defiance (not to say of religion) but of decency and common good manners;—so that it is no uncommon thing to behold vices, which heretofore were committed only in dark corners, now openly shew their face in broad day, and oft times with such an air of triumph, as if the party thought he was doing himself

himself honour,—or that he thought the deluding an unhappy creature, and the keeping her in a state of guilt, was as necessary a piece of grandeur as the keeping an equipage,—and did him as much credit as any other appendage of his fortune.—

If we pass on from the vices to the indecorums of the age (which is a softer name for vices) you will scarce see any thing, in what is called higher life, but what bespeaks a general relaxation of all order and discipline, in which our opinions as well as manners seem to be set loose from all restraints;—and, in truth, from all serious reflections too:—and one may venture to say, that

gaming and extravagance, to the utter ruin of the greatest estates,—minds dissipated with diversions, and heads giddy with a perpetual rotation of them, are the most general characters to be met with; and though one would expect, that at least the more solemn seasons of the year, set apart for the contemplation of Christ's sufferings, should give some check and interruption to them, yet what appearance is there ever amongst us, that it is so;—what one alteration does it make in the course of things? Is not the doctrine of mortification insulted by the same luxury of entertainments at our tables?—is not the same order of diversions perpetually returning, and scarce any thing else  
thought

thought of?—does not the same levity in dress, as well as discourse, shew itself in persons of all ages? I say of all ages, for it is no small aggravation of the corruption of our morals, that age, which by its authority was once able to frown youth into sobriety and better manners, and keep them within bounds, seems but too often to lead the way,—and by their unseasonable example give a countenance to follies and weakness, which youth is but too apt to run into without such a recommendation.—Surely age,—which is but one remove from death, should have nothing about it, but what looks like a decent preparation for it.—In purer times it was the case,—but now,—

grey hairs themselves scarce ever appear, but in the high mode and flanting garb of youth,—with heads as full of pleasure, and cloaths as ridiculously, and as much in the fashion, as the person who wears them is usually grown out of it:—upon which article give me leave to make a short reflection; which is this, that whenever the eldest equal the youngest in the vanity of their dress, there is no reason to be given for it, but that they equal them, if not surpass them, in the vanity of their desires.—

But this by the by.—

Though in truth the observation falls in with the main intention of  
this

this discourse,—which is not framed to flatter our follies, or touch them with a light hand, but plainly to point them out ; that by recalling to your mind, what manner of persons we really are, I might better lead you to the apostle's inference, of what manner of persons ye ought to be, in all holy conversation and godliness? looking for, and hastening unto the coming of the day of God.—

The apostle, in the concluding verse of this argument, exhorts, that they who look for such things be diligent, that they be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless ;—and one may conclude with him, that if the hopes or fears, either  
the

the reason or the passions of men are to be wrought upon at all, it must be from the force and influence of this awakening consideration in the text:—"That all these things shall be dissolved,—that this vain and perishable scene must change, that we who now tread the stage, must shortly be summoned away;—that we are creatures but of a day, hastening unto the place from whence we shall return no more;—that whilst we are here,—our conduct and behaviour is minutely observed;—that there is a Being about our paths and about our beds, whose omniscient eye spies out all our ways, and takes a faithful record of all the passages of our lives;—that these volumes shall



shall be produced and opened, and men shall be judged out of the things that are written in them ;—that without respect of persons, we shall be made accountable for our thoughts, our words and actions to this greatest and best of Beings, before whose judgment-seat we must finally appear, and receive the things done in the body, whether they are good, or whether they are bad.—

That to add to the terror of it,—this day of the Lord will come upon us like a thief in the night ;—of that hour no one knoweth ;—that we are not sure of its being suspended one day or one hour ; or, what is the same case,—that we are standing upon the  
edge

edge of a precipice, with nothing but the single thread of human life to hold us up;—and that if we fall unprepared in this thoughtless state, we are lost, and must perish for evermore.—

What manner of persons we ought to be, upon these principles of our religion, St. Peter has told us, in all holy conversation and godliness;—and I shall only remind, how different a frame of mind, the looking for, and hastening unto the coming of God, under such a life, is, from that of spending our days in vanity, and our years in pleasure.—

Give me leave, therefore, to conclude in that merciful warning, which  
our

our Saviour, the judge himself, hath given us, at the close of the same exhortation.—

Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be over-charged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and the cares of this life ;—and so that day come upon you unawares ;—for as a snare shall it come upon all that dwell on the face of the whole earth.— Watch therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man. Which may God of his mercy grant, through Jesus Christ. Amen.



# **S E R M O N   I V .**

**ST. PETER's Character.**



## S E R M O N IV.

ACTS iii. 12.

*And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?*

**T**HESE words, as the text tells us, were spoke by St. Peter, on the occasion of his miraculous cure of the lame man, who was laid at the gate of the temple, and, in the beginning of this chapter, had asked alms of St. Peter and St. John, as

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they went up together at the hour of prayer;—on whom St. Peter fastening his eyes, as in the 4th verse, and declaring he had no such relief to give him as he expected, having neither silver nor gold,—but that such as he had, the benefit of that divine power which he had received from his Master, he would impart to him,—he commands him forthwith, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, to rise up and walk.—And he took him by the hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle-bones received strength; and he leaped up, stood and walked, and entered with them into the temple, leaping and praising God.—

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It seems he had been born lame, had passed a whole life of despair, without hopes of ever being restored ; —so that the immediate sense of strength and activity communicated to him at once, in so surprising and unfought-for a manner, cast him into the transport of mind natural to a man so benefited beyond his expectation.—So that the amazing instance of a supernatural power ;—the notoriety of fact, wrought at the hour of prayer ;—the unexceptionableness of the object,—that it was no imposture, —for they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple ;—the unfeigned expressions of an enraptured heart almost beside itself, confirming the whole ;—

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the

the man that was healed, in the 10th verse, holding his benefactors, Peter and John, entering into the temple with them, walking and leaping, and praising God ;—the great concourse of people, drawn together by this event, in the 11th verse, for they all ran unto them, into the porch that was called Solomon's, greatly wondering.—Sure never was such a fair opportunity for an ambitious mind to have established a character of superior goodness and power.—To a man set upon this world, who sought his own praise and honour, what an invitation would it have been to have turned these circumstances to such a purpose ;—to have fallen in with the passions of an astonished and grateful city,

city, prepossessed, from what had happened, so strongly in his favour already, that little art or management was requisite to have improved their wonder and good opinion into the highest reverence of his sanctity, awe of his person, or whatever other belief should be necessary to feed his pride, or serve secret ends of glory and interest.—A mind not sufficiently mortified to the world, might have been tempted here to have taken the honour due to God—and transferred it to himself.—He might—not so—a disciple of Christ : for when Peter saw it, —when he saw the propensity in them to be misled on this occasion,—he answered and said unto the people, in the words of the text,—Ye men of Israel,

why marvel ye at this? or why look you so earnestly on us, as though by our own power and holiness we had made this man to walk?—the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his son Jesus.—

O holy, and blessed apostle !

How would thy meek and mortified spirit satisfy itself in uttering so humble and so just a declaration?—What an honest triumph wouldst thou taste the sweets of,—in thus conquering thy passion of vain glory,—keeping down thy pride,—disclaiming the praises which should have fed it, by telling the wondering spectators,

tors, It was not thy own power,—it was not thy own holiness, which had wrought this,—thou being of like passions and infirmities ;—but that it was the power of the God of Abraham,—the holiness of thy dear Lord, whom they crucified, operating by faith through thee, who wast but an instrument in his hands.—If thus honestly declining honour, which the occasion so amply invited thee to take ;—if this would give more satisfaction to a mind like thine, than the loudest praises of a mistaken people, what true rapture would be added to it from the reflection,—that in this instance of self-denial—thou hadst not only done well,—but, what was still a more endearing thought, that thou

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hadst

hadst been able to copy the example of thy divine Master, who, in no action of his life, sought ever his own praise, but on the contrary, declined all possible occasions of it;—and in the only public instance of honour which he suffered to be given him in his entrance into Jerusalem,—thou didst remember,—it was accepted with such a mixture of humility, that the prediction of the prophet was not more exactly fulfilled in the hosannas of the multitude, than in the meekness wherewith he received them, lowly and sitting upon an ass.—How could a disciple fail of profiting by the example of so humble a master, whose whole course of life was a particular lecture to this virtue, and, in every instance

instance of it, shewed plainly he came not to share the pride and glories of life, or gratify the carnal expectation of ambitious followers ; which, had he affected external pomp, he might have accomplished, by engrossing, as he could have done by a word, all the riches of the world ; and by the splendour of his court, and dignity of his person, had been greater than Solomon in all his glory, and have attracted the applause and admiration of the world :—this every disciple knew was in his power ;—so that the meanness of his birth,—the toils and poverty of his life,—the low offices in which he was engaged, by preaching the gospel to the poor—the numberless dangers and inconveniences attending

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attending the execution,—were all voluntary.—This humble choice both of friends and family out of the meanest of the people,—amongst whom he appeared rather as a servant than a master, coming not, as he often told them, to be ministered unto, but to minister,—and as the prophet had foretold in that mournful description of him, having no form nor comeliness, nor any beauty that we should desire him.—

How could a disciple, you'll say, reflect without benefit on this amiable character, with all the other tender pathetic proofs of humility, which his memory would suggest had happened of a piece with it, in the  
course



course of his master's life ;—but particularly at the conclusion and great catastrophe of it,—at his crucifixion ; the impressions of which could never be forgotten,—When a life full of so many engaging instances of humility, was crowned with the most endearing one of humbling himself to the death of the cross,—the death of a slave and a malefactor,—suffering himself to be led like a lamb to the slaughter,—dragged to Calvary without opposition or complaint, and as a sheep before his shearer is dumb, opening not his mouth.—

O blessed Jesus ! well might a disciple of thine learn of thee to be meek and lowly of heart, as thou exhortedst them

them all, for thou wast meek and lowly:—well might they profit, when such a lesson was seconded by such an example!—It is not to be doubted what force this must have had on the actions of those who were attendants and constant followers of our Saviour on earth;—saw the meekness of his temper in the occurrences of his life, and the amazing proof of it at his death, who, though he was able to call down legions of angels to his rescue, or by a single act of omnipotence to have destroyed his enemies; yet suppressed his almighty power,—neither resented—or revenged the indignity done him, but patiently suffered himself to be numbered with the transgressors.—

It

It could not well be otherwise, but that every eye-witness of this must have been wrought upon, in some degree, as the apostle, to let the same mind be in him which also was in Christ Jesus.—Nor will it be disputed how much of the honour of St. Peter's behaviour in the present transaction might be owing to the impressions he received, on that memorable occasion of his Lord's death, sinking still deeper, from the affecting remembrance of the many instances his master had given of this engaging virtue in the course of his life.—

St. Peter certainly was of a warm and sensible nature, as we may collect

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lect from the sacred writings,—a temper fittest to receive all the advantages which such impressions could give;—and therefore, as it is a day and place sacred to this great apostle, it may not be unacceptable, if I engage the remainder of your time, in a short essay upon his character, principally as it relates to this particular disposition of heart, which is the subject of the discourse.—

This great apostle was a man of distinction amongst the disciples, —and was one of such virtues and qualifications, as seem'd to have recommended him more than the advantage of his years, or knowledge.—

On

On his first admission to our Saviour's acquaintance, he gave a most evident testimony that he was a man of real and tender goodness, when being awakened by the miraculous draught of the fishes, as we read in the fifth of St. Luke, and knowing the author must necessarily be from God, he fell down instantly at his feet,—broke out into this humble and pious reflection ;—Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord !—The censure, you will say, expresses him a sinful man,—but so to censure himself,—with such unaffected modesty, implies more effectually than any thing else could,—that he was not in the common sense of the word,—a sinful, but a good man, who, like  
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the publican in the temple, was no less justified, for a self-accusation extorted merely from the humility of a devout heart jealous of its own imperfections.—And though the words, *depart from me*, carry in them the face of fear,—yet he who heard them, and knew the heart of the speaker, found they carried in them a greater measure of desire.—For Peter was not willing to be discharged from his new guest, but fearing his unfitness to accompany him, longed to be made more worthy of his conversation.—A meek and modest distrust of himself, seemed to have had no small share, at that time, in his natural temper and complexion; and though it would be greatly improved,  
and

and no doubt much better principled by the advantages on which I enlarged above, in his commerce and observation with his Lord and master,—yet it appears to have been an early and distinguishing part of his character.—An instance of this, though little in itself, and omitted by the other evangelists, is preserved by St. John, in his account of our Saviour's girding himself with a napkin, and washing the disciples feet; to which office, not one of them is represented as making any opposition: But when he came to Simon Peter,—the Evangelist tells,—Peter said to him,—Dost *Thou* wash my feet? Jesus said unto him, What I do, thou knowest not now, but shalt

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know

know hereafter.—Peter said to him,—  
 Thou shalt never wash my feet.—  
 Humility for a moment triumphed  
 over his submission,—and he expostulates with him upon it, with all the earnest and tender opposition which was natural to a humble heart, confounded with shame, that his Lord and master should insist to do so mean and painful an act of servitude to him.—

I would sooner form a judgment of a man's temper from his behaviour on such little occurrences of life, as these, than from the more weighed and important actions, where a man is more upon his guard;—has more preparation to disguise the true disposition



position of his heart,—and more temptation when disguised to impose it on others.—

This management was no part of Peter's character, who, with all the real and unaffected humility which he shewed, was possessed of such a quick sensibility and promptness of nature, which utterly unfitted him for art and premeditation.;—though this particular cast of temper had its disadvantages, at the same time, as it led him to an unreserved discovery of the opinions and prejudices of his heart, which he was wont to declare, and sometimes in so open and unguarded a manner, as exposed him

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to the sharpness of a rebuke where he could least bear it.—

I take notice of this, because it will help us in some measure to reconcile a seeming contradiction in his character, which will naturally occur here, from considering that great and capital failing of his life, when by a presumptuous declaration of his own fortitude, he fell into the disgrace of denying his Lord; in both of which he acted so opposite to the character here given, that you will ask,—How could so humble a man as you describe ever have been guilty of so self-sufficient and unguarded a vaunt, as that, though he should die with his Master,—yet would he  
not

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not deny him?—Or whence,—that so sincere and honest a man was, not better able to perform it?—

The case was this—

Our Lord, before he was betrayed, had taken occasion to admonish his disciples of the peril of lapsing,—telling them, 31st verse,—All ye shall be offended because of me this night.—To which Peter answering, with a zeal mix'd with too much confidence,—That though all should be offended, yet will I *never be offended*;—to check this trust in himself,—our Saviour replies, that he in particular should deny him *thrice*.—But Peter looking upon this moni-

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tion no farther than as it implied a reproach to his faith, and his love, and his courage;—stung to the heart to have them called in question by his Lord,—he hastily summons them all up to form his final resolution,—Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.—The resolve was noble and dutiful to the last degree,—and I make no doubt as honest a one—that is, both as just in the matter, and as sincere in the intention, as ever was made by any of mankind;—his character not suffering us to imagine he made it in a braving dissimulation:—no;—for he proved himself sufficiently in earnest by his subsequent behaviour in the garden, when he drew his sword  
against

against a whole band of men, and thereby made it appear, that he had less concern for his own life, than he had for his master's safety.—How then came his resolution to miscarry? —The reason seems purely this:—Peter grounded the execution of it upon too much confidence in himself,—doubted not but his will was in his power, whether God's grace assisted him or not;—surely thinking, that what he had courage to resolve so honestly, he had likewise ability to perform.—This was his mistake,—and though it was a very great one,—yet was in some degree akin to a virtue,—as it sprung merely from a consciousness of his integrity and truth, and too adventurous a con-

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clusion of what they would enable him to perform, on the sharpest encounters for his Master's sake :—so that his failing in this point, was but a consequence of this hasty and ill-considered resolve ;—and his Lord to rebuke and punish him for it, did no other than leave him to his own strength to perform it ;—which, in effect, was almost the same as leaving him to the necessity of not performing it at all.—The great apostle had not considered, that he who cautioned him was the searcher of hearts,—and needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man :—he did not remember, that his Lord had said before,—Without me ye can do nothing ;—

thing;—that the execution of all our faculties were under the power of his will:—he had forgot the knowledge of this needful truth; on this, one unhappy juncture,—where he had so great a temptation to the contrary,—though he was full of the persuasion in every other transaction of his life,—but most visibly here in the text,—where he breaks forth in the warm language of a heart still overflowing with remembrance of this very mistake he had once committed;—Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this?—as though by our own power and holiness we had wrought this?—The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob,—the God of our fathers, through faith in his name hath made  
this.

this man whole, whom ye see and know.—

This is the best answer I am able to make to this objection against the uniformity of the apostle's character which I have given :—upon which let it be added,—that was no such apology capable of being made in its behalf;—that the truth and regularity of a character is not, in justice, to be looked upon as broken, from any one single act or omission which may seem a contradiction to it :—the best of men appear sometimes to be strange compounds of contradictory qualities : and were the accidental oversights and folly of the wisest man,—the failings and imperfections



fections of a religious man,—the hasty acts and passionate words of a meek man ;—were they to rise up in judgment against them,—and an ill-natured judge be suffered to mark in this manner what has been done amiss,—what character so unexceptionable as to be able to stand before him ?—So that, with the candid allowances which the infirmities of a man may claim when he falls, through surprize more than a premeditation,—one may venture upon the whole to sum up Peter's character in a few words.—He was a man sensible in his nature,—of quick passions, tempered with the greatest humility and most unaffected poverty of spirit that ever met in such a character.—So that in  
the

the only criminal instance of his life, which I have spoke to, you are at a loss which to admire most;—the tenderness and sensibility of his soul, in being wrought upon to repentance by a look from Jesus;—or the uncommon humility of it, which he testified thereupon, in the bitterness of his sorrow for what he had done.—He was once presumptuous in trusting to his own strength; his general and true character was that of the most engaging meekness,—distrustful of himself and his abilities to the last degree.—

He denied his master.—But in all instances of his life, but that, was a man of the greatest truth and sincerity;—to which part of his character

racter our Saviour has given an undeniable testimony, in conferring on him the cymbolical name of Cephas, a rock, a name the most expressive of constancy and firmness.—

He was a man of great love to his master,—and of no less zeal for his religion, of which, from among many, I shall take one instance out of St. John, with which I shall conclude this account.—Where, upon the desertion of several other disciples,—our Saviour puts the question to the twelve,—Will ye also go away?—Then, says the text, Peter answered and said,—Lord! whither shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life,—and we believe, and know that  
 6 thou

thou art Christ the son of God:—  
Now, if we look into the gospel, we  
find what our Saviour pronounced on  
this very confession.

Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for  
flesh and blood hath not revealed it  
unto thee,—but my Father which is  
in heaven.—That our Saviour had the  
words of eternal life,—Peter was able  
to deduce from principles of natural  
reason; because reason was able to  
judge from the internal marks of his  
doctrine, that it was worthy God, and  
accommodated properly to advance  
human nature and human happiness.  
—But for all this,—reason could not  
infallibly determine that the messen-  
ger of this doctrine was the Messias,  
the

the eternal son of the living God :—  
 to know this required an illumination ;—and this illumination, I say, seems to have been vouchsafed at that instant as a reward,—as would have been sufficient evidence by itself of the disposition of his heart,—

I have now finished this short essay upon the character of St. Peter, not with a loud panegyric upon the power of his keys, or a ranting encomium upon some monastic qualifications, with which a popish pulpit would ring upon such an occasion, without doing much honour to the saint, or good to the audience ;—but have drawn it with truth and sobriety, representing it as it was, as consisting  
 of

of virtues the most worthy of imitation,—and grounded, not upon apocryphal accounts and legendary inventions, the wardrobe from whence popery dresses out her saints on these days,—but upon matters of fact in the sacred Scriptures, in which all christians agree.—And since I have mentioned *popery*, I cannot better conclude than by observing, how ill the spirit and character of that church resembles that particular part of St. Peter's which has been made the subject of this discourse.—Would one think that a church, which thrusts itself under this apostle's patronage, and claims her power under him, would presume to exceed the degrees of it which he acknowledged to possess

sels himself.—But how ill are your expectations answered, when instead of the humble declaration in the text,  
—Ye men of Israel, marvel not at us, as if our own power and holiness had wrought this;—you hear a language and behaviour from the Romish court, as opposite to it as insolent words and actions can frame.—

So that instead of, Ye men of Israel, marvel not at us,—Ye men of Israel, *do* marvel at us,—hold us in admiration:—Approach our sacred pontiff, —(who is not only holy—but holiness itself)—approach his person with reverence, and deem it the greatest honour and happiness of your lives to

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fall

fall down before his chair, and be admitted to kiss his feet.—

Think not, as if it were not our own holiness which merits all the homage you can pay us.—It is our own holiness,—the superabundance of it, of which, having more than we know what to do with ourselves,—from works of supererogation, we have transferred the surplus in ecclesiastic ware-houses, and in pure zeal for the good of your souls, have established public banks of merit, ready to be drawn upon at all times.—

Think not, ye men of Israel, or say within yourselves, that we are unprofitable servants ;—we have no good  
works



## S E R M O N IV. 115

works to spare, or that if we had,—  
we cannot make this use of them ;—  
that we have no power to circulate  
our indulgencies,—and huckster them  
out, as we do, through all the parts  
of Christendom.—Know ye by these  
presents, that it is our own power  
which does this ;—the plenitude of  
our apostolick power operating with  
our own holiness that enables us to  
bind and loose, as seems meet to us  
on earth ;—to save your souls or de-  
liver them up to Satan, and as they  
please or displease, to indulge whole  
kingdoms at once, or excommunicate  
them all ;—binding kings in chains,  
and your nobles in links of iron.—

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That

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That we may never again feel the effects of such language and principles,—may God of his mercy grant us.    Amen.

# S E R M O N V.

Thirtieth of January.



## S E R M O N V.

EZRA ix. 6, 7.

*And I said, O my God, I am ashamed  
and blush to lift up my face to thee,  
my God:—for our iniquities are in-  
creased over our head, and our tres-  
pass is grown up unto the heavens.—  
Since the days of our fathers have  
we been in a great trespass unto this  
day.—*

**T**H E R E is not, I believe,  
throughout all history, an in-  
stance of so strange and obstinately  
corrupt a people, as the Jews, of whom  
Ezra complains ;—for though, on one  
I 4 hand,—

hand,—there never was a people that received so many testimonies of God's favour to encourage them to be good,—so, on the other hand, there never was a people which so often felt the scourge of their iniquities to dishearten them from doing evil.—

And yet neither the one or the other seem'd ever able to make them either the wiser or better;—neither God's blessings, nor his corrections could ever soften them;—they still continued a thankless, unthinking people,—who profited by no lessons, neither were to be won with mercies, nor terrified with punishments,—but on every succeeding trials and occasions,

fions, extremely disposed against God, to go astray and act wickedly.

In the words of the text, the prophet's heart overflows with sorrow, upon his reflection of this unworthy part of their character;—and the manner of his application to God, is so expressive of his humble sense of it,—and there is something in the words so full of tenderness and shame for them upon that score,—as bespeaks the most paternal, as well as pastoral concern for them.—And he said,—O my God, I am ashamed,—and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God.—No doubt, the holy man was confounded to look back upon that long series of so many of God's undeserved

undeserved mercies to them, of which they had made so bad and ungrateful a use:—he considered, that they had all the motives that could lay restraints either upon a considerate or a reasonable people;—that God had not only created, upheld, and favoured them with all advantages in common with the rest of their fellow creatures,—but had been particularly kind to them;—that when they were in the house of bondage, in the most hopeless condition,—he had heard their cry and took compassion upon their afflictions, and by a chain of great and mighty deliverances, had set them free from the yoke of oppression.—The prophet, no doubt, reflected at the same time, that besides this instance



stance of God's goodness in first favouring their miraculous escape,—a series of successes not to be accounted for from second causes, and the natural course of events, had crowned their heads in so remarkable a manner, as to afford an evident proof, not only of God's general concern, but of his particular providence and attachment to them above all people:—in the wilderness he led them like sheep, and kept them as the apple of his eye;—he suffered no man to do them wrong,—but reprobated even kings for their sake;—that when they entered into the promised land, no force was able to stand before them;—when in possession,—no army was ever able to drive

drive them out ;—that nations greater and mightier than they, were thrust forth from before them ;—that, in a word, all nature for a time was driven backwards by the hands of God, to serve them, and that even the sun itself had stood still in the midst of heaven, to secure their victories ;—that when all these mercies were cast away upon them,—and no principle of gratitude or interest could make them an obedient people,—God had tried by misfortunes to bring them back ;—that when instructions, warnings, invitations, miracles, prophets and holy guides had no effect,—he at last suffered them to reap the wages of their folly, by letting them fall again into the same state of bondage

dage in Babylon, from whence he had first raised them.—Here it is that Ezra pours out his confession.—It was no small aggravation to Ezra's concern, to find that even this last trial had no good effect upon their conduct;—that all the alternatives of promises and threats, comforts and afflictions, instead of making them grow the better,—made them apparently grow the worse :—how could he intercede for them, but with shame and sorrow;—and say, as in the text,—O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee,—for our iniquities are increased over our heads,—and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens;—since the  
days

days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day.—

Thus much for the prophet's humble confession to God for the Jews, for which he had but too just a foundation given by them;—and I know not how I can make a better use of the words, as the occasion of the day led me to the choice of them,—than by a serious application of the same sad confession, in regard to ourselves.—

Our fathers, like those of the Jews in Ezra's time,—no doubt have done amiss, and greatly provoked God by their violence;—but if our own iniquities, like theirs, are increased over  
our

our heads ;—if since the days of our fathers we have been in great trespass ourselves unto this day,—’tis fit this day we should be put in mind of it ;—nor can the time and occasion be better employ’d, than in hearing with patience the reproofs which such a parallel will lead me to give.—

It must be acknowledged, there is no nation which had ever so many extraordinary reasons and supernatural motives to become thankful and virtuous as the Jews had ;—yet, at the same time, there is no one which has not sufficient (and setting aside at present the consideration of a future state as a reward for being so)—there is no nation under heaven, which, besides the  
daily

daily blessings of God's providence to them, but have received sufficient blessings and mercies at the hands of God to engage their best services, and the warmest returns of gratitude they can pay:—there has been a time, may be, when they have been delivered from some grievous calamity,—from the rage of pestilence or famine,—from the edge and fury of the sword,—from the fate and fall of kingdoms round them;—they may have been preserved by providential discoveries, and plots, and designs against the well-being of their states,—or by critical turns and revolutions in their favour when beginning to sink;—by some signal interposition of God's providence;—they  
may

may have rescued their liberties, and all that was dear to them, from the jaws of some tyrant;—or may have preserved their religion pure and uncorrupted, when all other comforts fail'd them.—

If other countries have reason to be thankful to God for any one of these mercies, much more has *this* of ours, which at one time or other hath received them all;—inasmuch that our history, for this last century, has scarce been any thing else but the history of our deliverances, and God's blessings,—and these in so complicated a chain, and with so little interruption,—as to be scarce ever vouchsafed to any nation or language be-

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sides,

fides,—except the Jews;—and with regard to them, though inferior in the stupendous manner of their working,—yet no way so in the extensive goodness of their effects, and the infinite benevolence which must have wrought them for us.—Here then let us stop and look back a moment, and enquire, as in the case of the Jews, what great effects all this has had upon our lives,—and how far worthy we have lived—of what we have received?—

A stranger,—when he heard—that this island had been so favoured by heaven,—so happy in our laws and religion,—so flourishing in our trade,—so blessed in our situation and natural



tural product,—and in all of them so often,—so visibly protected by providence,—would conclude, our gratitude and morals had kept pace with our blessings ;—and he would say,—as we are the most blessed and favoured,—that we must be the most virtuous and religious people upon the face of the earth,

Would to God ! there was any other reason to incline one to so charitable a belief ;—for without running into any common-place declamation upon the wickedness of the age,—we may say within the bounds of truth,—that we have profited in this respect as little as it was possible for the Jews ;—that there is as little virtue,

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—and

—and as little sense of religion, at least as little of the appearance of it, as can be supposed to exist at all, in a country where it is countenanced by the state.—Our forefathers, whatever greater degrees of real virtue they were possessed of,—God; who searcheth the heart,—best knows;—but this is certain, in their days they had at least—the form of godliness, —and paid this compliment to religion, as to wear at least the appearance and outward garb of it.—The public service of God was better frequented,—and in a devout, as well as regular manner;—there was no open profaneness in our streets to put piety to the blush,—or domestic ridicule,

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cule, to make her uneasy, and force her to withdraw.—

Religion, though treated with freedom, was still treated with respect ;—the youth of both sexes kept under greater restraint ;—good orders and good hours were then kept up in most families ; and, in a word, a greater strictness and sobriety of manners maintained throughout amongst people of all ranks and conditions ;—so that vice, however secretly it might be practised,—was ashamed to be seen.—

But all this has insensibly been borne down, ever since the days of our forefathers trespass ;—when, to avoid

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one extreme, we began to run into another ;—so that instead of any great religion amongst us, you see thousands who are tired even of the form of it, and who have at length thrown the mask of it aside,—as an useless incumbrance.—

But this licentiousness, he would say, may be chiefly owing to a long course of prosperity, which is apt to corrupt mens minds.—God has since this tried you with afflictions ;—you have been visited with a long and expensive war :—God has sent, moreover, a pestilence amongst your cattle, which has cut off the stock from the fold,—and left no herd in the stalls.—Surely he'll say,—two such terrible scourges

Scourges must have awakened the consciences of the most unthinking part of you, and forced the inhabitants of your land—from such admonitions,—though they failed with the Jews, to have learnt righteousness for themselves.—

I own this is the natural effect,—and one would hope should always be the natural use and improvement from such calamities ;—for we often find that numbers who, in prosperity, seem to forget God, do yet remember him in the day of trouble and distress.—Yet consider this nationally,—we see no such effect from it in fact, as one would be led to expect from the speculation :—for instance,—with

all the devastation, bloodshed, and expence which the war has occasioned,—how many converts has it made to frugality,—to virtue, or even to seriousness itself?—The pestilence amongst our cattle,—though it has distressed and utterly undone so many thousands, yet what one visible alteration has it made in the course of our lives?—

And though one would imagine that the necessary drains of taxes for the one,—and the loss of rents and property from the other, should in some measure have withdrawn the means of gratifying our passions, as we have done;—yet what appearance

ance is there amongst us, that it is so?—

What one fashionable folly or extravagance has been checked by it?—Is not there the same luxury and epicurism of entertainments at our tables?—do we not pursue with eagerness the same giddy round of trifling diversions?—is not the infection diffused amongst people of all ranks, and all ages?—And even grey hairs, whose sober example and manners ought to check the extravagant follies of the thoughtless, gay, and unexperienced,—too often totter under the same costly ornaments, and join the general riot. Where vanity, like this, governs the heart, even  
charity

charity will allow us to suppose, that a consciousness of their inability to pursue greater excesses, is the only vexation of spirit.—In truth, the observation falls in with the main intention of the discourse,—which is not framed to flatter your follies,—but plainly to point them out, and shew you the general corruption of manners, and want of religion;—which all men see,—and which the wise and good so much lament.—

But the enquirer will naturally go on, and say, that though this representation does not answer his expectations, that undoubtedly we must have profited by these lessons in other respects;—that though we have not approved our understanding in the  
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the sight of God, by a virtuous use of our misfortunes, to true wisdom;—that we must have improved them, however, to political wisdom;—so that he would say,—though the English do not appear to be a religious people,—they are at least a loyal one:—They have so often felt the scourge of rebellion, and have tasted so much sharp fruit from it,—as to have set their teeth on edge forever.—But, good God! how would he be astonished to find,—that though we have been so often tost to and fro by our own tempestuous humours,—that we were not yet sick of the storm;—that though we solemnly, on every return of this day, lament the guilt of our forefathers in staining their hands in blood,—

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we never once think of our principles and practices, which tend the same way :—and though the providence of God has set bounds, that they do not work as much mischief,—as in days of distraction and desolation,—little reason have we to ascribe the merit thereof to our own wisdom ;—so that, when the whole account is stated betwixt us,—there seems nothing to prevent the application of the words in the text ;—that our iniquities are increased over our heads, and our trespass is grown up unto the heaven.—Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day ;—and though it is fit and becoming that we weep for them,—’tis much more  
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so, that we weep for ourselves,—that we lament our own corruptions,—and the little advantages we have made of the mercies or chastisements of God,—or from the sins and provocations of our forefathers.—

This is the fruit we are to gather, in a day of such humiliation;—and unless it produces that for us, by a reformation of our manners, and by turning us from the error of our ways,—the service of this day is more a senseless insult upon the memories of our ancestors,—than an honest design to profit by their mistakes and misfortunes,—and to become wiser and better from our reflections upon them.—

Till

Till this is done, it avails little, though we pray fervently to God not to lay their sins to our charge,—whilst we have so many remaining of our own.—Unless we are touched for ourselves, how can we expect he should hear our cry? It is the wicked corruption of a people which they are to thank for whatever natural calamities they feel;—this is the very state we are in,—which, by disengaging providence from taking our part,—will always leave a people exposed to the whole force of accidents, both from within and without:—and however statesmen may dispute about the causes of the growth or decay of kingdoms,—it is for this cause.

cause, a matter of eternal truth,—that as virtue and religion are our only recommendation to God,—that they are, consequently, the only true basis of our happiness and prosperity on earth.—And however we may shelter ourselves under distinctions of party,—that a wicked man is the worst enemy the state has;—and for the contrary, it will always be found, that a virtuous man is the best patriot, and the best subject the king has.—And though an individual may say, what will my righteousness profit a nation of men?—I answer,—if it fail of a blessing here (which is not likely), it will have one advantage,—it will save thy own soul,  
and

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and give thee that peace at the last,  
which this world cannot take away.—

Which God, of his infinite mercy,  
grant us all.    Amen.

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## S E R M O N VI.

ROMANS ii. 4.

*Despiseſt thou the riches of his goodneſs,  
and forbearance, and long ſuffering,—  
knowing that the goodneſs of God  
leadeth thee to repentance?*

So ſays St. Paul. And

ECCLESIASTES viii. 11.

*Be cauſe ſentence againſt an evil work  
is not executed ſpeedily; therefore the  
heart of the ſons of men is fully ſet in  
them to do evil.—*

**T**AKE either as you like it, you  
will get nothing by the bar-  
gain.—

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'Tis a terrible character of the world, which Solomon is here accounting for,—that their hearts were fully set in them to do evil.—And the general outcry against the wickedness of the age, in every age, from Solomon's down to this, shews but too lamentably what grounds have all along been given for the complaint.—

The disorder and confusion arising in the affairs of the world from the wickedness of it, being ever such,—so evidently seen,—so severely felt, as naturally to induce every one who was a spectator or a sufferer, to give the melancholy preference to the times  
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he lived in; as if the corruptions of men's manners had not only exceeded the reports of former days, but the power almost of rising above the pitch to which the wickedness of the age was arrived.—How far they may have been deceived in such calculations, I shall not enquire;—let it suffice, that mankind have ever been bad,—considering what motives they have had to be better;—and taking this for granted, instead of declaiming against it, let us see whether a discourse may not be as serviceable, by endeavouring, as Solomon has here done, rather to give an account of it, and by tracing back the evils to their first

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prin-

principles, to direct ourselves to the true remedy against them.—

Let it here only be premised,—that the wickedness either of the present or past times, whatever scandal and reproach it brings upon christians,—ought not in reason to reflect dishonour upon christianity, which is so apparently well framed to make us good,—that there is not a greater paradox in nature,—than that so good a religion should be no better recommended by its professors.—Though this may seem a paradox,—’tis still, I say, no objection, though it has often been made use of against christianity ;—since, if the morals of men are not reformed, it is not owing to  
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a defect in the revelation, but 'tis owing to the same causes which defeated all the use and intent of reason, —before revelation was given.—For setting aside the obligations which a divine law lays upon us,—whoever considers the state and condition of human nature, and upon this view, how much stronger the natural motives are to virtue than to vice, would expect to find the world much better than it is, or ever has been.—For who would suppose the generality of mankind to betray so much folly, as to act against the common interest of their own kind, as every man does who yields to the temptation of what is wrong.—But on the other side,—if men first look into the practice of

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the world, and there observe the strange prevalency of vice, and how willing men are to defend as well as to commit it,—one would think they believed that all discourses of virtue and honesty were mere matter of speculation for men to entertain some idle hours with;—and say truly, that men seemed universally to be agreed in nothing but in speaking well and doing ill.—But this casts no more dishonour upon reason than it does upon revelation;—the truth of the case being this,—that no motives have been great enough to restrain those from sin who have secretly loved it, and only sought pretences for the practice of it.—So that if the light of the gospel has not left a sufficient provision

provision against the wickedness of the world,—the true answer is, that there can be none.—’Tis sufficient that the excellency of christianity in doctrine and precepts, and its proper tendency to make us virtuous as well as happy, is a strong evidence of its divine original,—and these advantages it has above any institution that ever was in the world:—it gives the best directions,—the best examples,—the greatest encouragements,—the best helps, and the greatest obligation to gratitude.—But as religion was not to work upon men by way of force and natural necessity,—but by moral persuasion,—which sets good and evil before them;—so that, if men have power to do evil, or chuse the good,  
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and will abuse it, this cannot be avoided.—Not only religion, but even reason itself, must necessarily imply a freedom of choice; and all the beings in the world, which have it, were created free to stand or free to fall:—and therefore men that will not be wrought upon by this way of address, must expect, and be contented, to feel the stroke of that rod which is prepared for the back of fools, oft times in this world, but undoubtedly in the next, from the hands of a righteous governor, who will finally render to every man according to his works.—

Because this sentence is not always executed speedily, is the wise man's account of the general licentiousness  
which



which prevailed through the race of mankind,—so early as his days; and we may allow it a place, amongst the many other fatal causes of depravation in our own;—a few of which, I shall beg leave to add to this explication of the wise man's; subjoining a few practical cautions in relation to each, as I go along.—

To begin with Solomon's account in the text,—that because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil.—

It seems somewhat hard to understand the consequence, why men should

should grow more desperately wicked,—because God is merciful and gives them space to repent;—this is no natural effect,—nor does the wise man intend to insinuate that the goodness and long suffering of God, is the cause of the wickedness of man, by a direct efficacy to harden sinners in their course.—But the scope of his discourse is this, Because a vicious man escapes at present, he is apt to draw false conclusions from it, and from the delay of God's punishment in this life, either to conceive them at so remote a distance, or perhaps so uncertain, that though he has some doubtful misgivings of the future, yet he hopes in the main, that his fears are greater  
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than his danger ;—and from observing some of the worst of men both live and die without any outward testimony of God's wrath,—draws from thence some flattering ground of encouragement for himself, and with the wicked in the psalm, says in his heart, Tush, I shall never be cast down, there shall no harm happen unto me :—as if it was necessary, if God is to punish at all, that he must do it presently ;—which by the way, would rather seem to bespeak rage and fury of an incensed party, than the determination of a wise and patient judge,—who respites punishment to another state, declaring for the wisest reasons, this is not the time for it to take place in,—but  
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that he has appointed a day for it; wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, and make such unalterable distinctions betwixt the good and bad,—as to render his future judgment a full vindication of his justice.—

That mankind have ever made an ill use of this forbearance, is, and I fear will ever be, the case:—and St. Peter, in his description of the scoffers in the latter days, who, he tells us, shall walk after their own lusts, (the worst of all characters) he gives the same sad solution of what should be their unhappy encouragement;—for that they would say,—Where is the promise [where is the threatening,

ing, or declaration of, ἡ ἐπαγγελία] of his coming,—for since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation;—that is, the world goes on in the same uninterrupted course, where all things fall alike to all, without any interposition from above,—or any outward token of divine displeasure:—upon this ground, “Come ye,” say they, as the prophet represents them, “I will fetch wine and we will fill ourselves with strong drink, and to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.”

Now if you consider, you will find, that all this false way of reasoning doth arise from that gross piece of self-

self-flattery, that such do imagine God to be like themselves,—that is, as cruel and revengeful as they are,—and they presently think, if a fellow creature offended them at the rate that sinners are said to offend God, and they had as much power in their hands to punish and torture them as he has, they would be sure to execute it speedily ;—but because they see God does it not, therefore they conclude, that all the talk of God's anger against vice, and his future punishment of it,—is mere talk, calculated for the terror of old women and children.—Thus speak they peace to their souls, when there is no peace ;—for though a sinner (which the wise man adds by way of  
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of caution after the text) for though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged upon the earth,—yet sure I know, that it shall be well with them that fear God,—but shall not be well with the wicked.—Upon which argument, the psalmist, speaking in the name of God,—uses this remonstrance to one under this fatal mistake which has misled thousands ;—these things thou didst, and I kept silence :—And it seems this silence was interpreted into consent ;—for it follows,—and thou thoughtest I was altogether such a one as thyself ;—but the psalmist adds, how ill he took this at men's hands, and that they should not know the difference between the forbear-

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ance of sinners,—and his neglect of their sins ;—but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thee.— Upon the whole of which, he bids them be better advised, and consider, lest, while they forget God, he pluck them away, and there be none to deliver them.—

Thus much for the first ground and cause which the text gives, why the hearts of the sons of men are so fully set in them to do evil ;—upon which I have only one or two cautions to add—That, in the first place, we frequently deceive ourselves in the calculation that sentence shall not be speedily executed.—By sad experience, vicious and debauched  
men



men find this matter to turn out very different in practice, from their expectations in theory; God having so contrived the nature of things throughout the whole system of moral duties,—that every vice, in some measure, should immediately revenge itself upon the doer;—that falsehood, and unfair dealing, ends in distrust and dishonour;—that drunkenness and debauchery, should weaken the thread of life, and cut it so short, that the transgressor shall not live out half his days;—that pride should be followed by mortifications;—extravagance by poverty and distress;—that the revengeful and malicious, should be the greatest tormentor of himself,—the perpetual disturbance

of his own mind, being so immediate a chastisement, as to verify what the wise man says upon it,—That as the merciful man does good to his own soul, so he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh.—

In all which cases there is a punishment independent of these, and that is, the punishment which a man's own mind takes upon itself, from the remorse of doing what is wrong.—*Prima est hæc ultio*,—this is the first revenge which (whatever other punishments he may escape) is sure to follow close upon his heels, and haunts him wheresoever he goes;—for whenever a man commits a wilful bad action,—he drinks down poison,  
which,

which, though it may work slowly, will work surely, and give him perpetual pains and heart-aches,—and, if no means be used to expel it, will destroy him at last.—So that, notwithstanding that final sentence of God is not executed speedily in exact weight and measure,—there is nevertheless a sentence executed, which a man's own conscience pronounces against him;—and every wicked man, I believe, feels as regular a process within his own breast commenced against himself, and finds himself as much accused, and as evidently and impartially condemned for what he has done amiss, as if he had received sentence before the most awful tribunal;—which judgment of consci-

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ence,

ence, as it can be looked upon in no other light but as an anticipation of that righteous and unalterable sentence which will be pronounced hereafter by that Being to whom he is finally to give an account of his actions—I cannot conceive the state of his mind under any character than of that anxious doubtfulness described by the prophet,—That the wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and filth.

A second caution against this uniform ground of false hope, in sentence not being executed speedily, will arise from this consideration,—That in our vain calculation of this distant

distant point of retribution, we generally respite it to the day of judgment;—and as that may be a thousand, or ten thousand years off, it proportionably lessens the terror.—To rectify this mistake, we should first consider, that the distance of a thing no way alters the nature of it.—2dly, That we are deceived in this distant prospect, not considering that however far off we may fix it in this belief, that in fact it is no farther off from every man than the day of his own death.—And how certain that day is, we need not surely be reminded:—’Tis the certainty of the matter, and of an event which will as surely come to pass, as that the sun shall rise to-morrow morning,—that  
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should enter as much into our calculations, as if it was hanging over our heads.—For though, in our fond imaginations, we dream of living many years upon the earth;—how unexpectedly are we summoned from it?—How oft, in the strength of our age, in the midst of our projects,—when we are promising ourselves the ease of many years?—how oft, at that very time, and in the height of this imagination, is the decree sealed, and the commandment gone forth to call us into another world?—

This may suffice for the examination of this one great cause of the corruption of the world;—from whence I should proceed, as I purposed, to an enquiry after some other  
unhappy

unhappy causes which have a share in this evil.—But I have taken up so much more of your time in this than I first intended,—that I shall defer what I have to say to the next occasion, and put an end to this discourse, by an answer to a question often asked relatively to this argument, in prejudice of christianity, which cannot be more seasonably answered than in a discourse at this time ;—and that is, —Whether the christian religion has done the world any service in reforming the lives and morals of mankind, —which some who pretend to have considered the present state of vice, seem to doubt of?—This objection I, in some measure, have anticipated in the beginning of this discourse ;—and what I have to add to that argument

ment is this,—that as it is impossible to decide the point by evidence of facts, which at so great a distance cannot be brought together and compared,—it must be decided by reason, and the probability of things; upon which issue, one might appeal to the most professed deist, and trust him to determine,—whether the lives of those who are set loose from all obligations, but those of expediency,—can be compared with those who have been blest with the extraordinary light of a religion?—and whether so just and holy a religion as the christian, which sets restraints even upon our thoughts,—a religion which gives us the most engaging ideas of the perfections of God,—at the same time that it impresses the most awful ones  
of



of his majesty and power ;—a Being rich in mercies, but if they are abused, terrible in his judgments ;—one constantly about our secret paths,—about our beds ;—who spieth out all our ways,—noticeth all our actions, and is so pure in his nature, that he will punish even the wicked imaginations of the heart, and has appointed a day wherein he will enter into this enquiry, and execute judgment according as we have deserved.—

If either the hopes or fears, the passions or reason of men are to be wrought upon at all, such principles must have an effect, though, I own, very far short of what a thinking man should expect from such motives.—

No

No doubt, there is great room for amendment in the christian world,—and the professors of our holy religion may in general be said to be a very corrupt and bad generation of men,—considering what reasons and obligations they have to be better.—Yet still I affirm, if those restraints were lessened,—the world would be infinitely worse;—and therefore we cannot sufficiently bless and adore the goodness of God, for these advantages brought by the coming of Christ,—which God grant that we may live to be more deserving of;—that, in the last day, when he shall come again to judge the world, we may rise to life immortal.    Amen.

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